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van Lange, P.A.M.

**published in**  
Psychological Inquiry  
2000

**document version**  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

### **citation for published version (APA)**

van Lange, P. A. M. (2000). Self-determination in interpersonal situations. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 310-312.  
<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&hid=8&sid=34a248ae-378f-49b1-a5f7-456b5508b86c%40sessionmgr14>

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## Self-Determination in Interpersonal Situations

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Self-determination theory (SDT) provides a thoughtful analysis of the psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, the adaptive value of these needs, as well as how these needs relate to past contemporary theories of motivation. SDT is one of the few theories within psychology that extends and complements the "logic" that rewards and punishments always guide people in the predicted direction: Indeed, rewards may have hidden costs as well as hidden gains. Given that rewards and cost are so omnipresent, the processes outlined by SDT should be relevant to many different situations, varying from close relationships, educational settings, organizations, to societies at large. It also interesting to note that SDT seems particularly relevant to social dilemmas: conflicts between self-interest and collective interest (Komorita & Parks, 1995). According to SDT, people may not always respond to externally provided cost and rewards in a manner consistent with "economic theory" and rational choice models. For example, in regulating social dilemmas, governments may sometimes exert too much control, so that the provision of rewards for "cooperative" behavior (e.g., tax reduction for those who commute by public transportation rather than by car) turn out less effective than many policymakers had anticipated. Some work on social dilemmas provides at least indirect support for this reasoning, although it is not clear whether the hidden costs of rewards ultimately need to be understood in terms of the needs for competence, relatedness, or autonomy (e.g., Van Lange, Van Vugt, & De Cremer, 2000).

In this commentary, I discuss the utility of SDT in the context of interpersonal situations. The basic thrust of this commentary is that although SDT can provide a reasonable account of motivational processes in interpersonal situations, this account needs to be considered in light of alternative theories that focus on the sequence of behavior (i.e., patterns of social interaction) and relationship-relevant features that shape motivation, behavior, and interaction.

### Self-Determination in Interpersonal Situations

Is self-determination essential to our understanding of social interaction or interpersonal behavior? Should other types of theoretical analyses complement SDT? Although Deci and Ryan (this issue) do not directly address this issue, they do stress the importance of the in-

terpersonal or social environment in outlining some key postulates and definitions. The concept of social structures is emphasized in the organismic-dialectical approach that is central to SDT, and the concept of "social world" is emphasized in the definition of needs. SDT suggests that social contexts that support the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy help individuals maintain or enhance intrinsic motivation, regulatory orientations, and aspiration of life goals, which in turn, enhance functioning and mental well-being.

Although SDT emphasizes the importance of social influences, SDT does not advance a systematic analysis of concepts such as social structures. That is, SDT does not provide a taxonomy of social structure in order to understand the basic situational features that are relevant to support—and lack of support—for the needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. A taxonomic approach to situations might also illuminate whether and why the three needs are fundamental to understanding functioning and mental health. I hope to illustrate that, at the very least, theoretical approaches that are inherently "social" or "interpersonal" are needed to fully understand the manner in which external rewards influence motivation, behavior, and interaction.

### An Illustration

In a recent article entitled "How intrinsic motivation is crowded out and in," Frey (1994) describes an interpersonal scenario to illustrate the undermining effect of extrinsic rewards (which he referred to as the "crowding out effect"). The scenario reads as follows:

A boy on good terms with his parents willingly mows the lawn of the house. His father then offers to pay him a fee for each time he cuts the lawn. As a result, the boy now only mows the lawn when the payment comes forth—nor is he prepared to do any other type of housework for free. (Frey, 1994, p. 243)

How should one explain that the boy is no longer prepared to do any housework for free? According to Deci and Ryan, the payment by the father does not acknowledge, for example, the level of competence and autonomy that is associated with mowing the lawn, and so, the boy will begin to exhibit lower levels of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In the following I analyze the scenario from an interpersonal perspective, hoping to demonstrate the overall utility of this perspective.

In the scenario, the relationship between the boy and parents is good, which may well be the interpersonal context in which paying represents an external intervention or extrinsic reward, which is said to undermine intrinsic motivation. But this response could also be interpreted in terms of a sequence of interpersonal behavior, that is, in terms of social interaction. Presumably, the boy is willing to mow the lawn without receiving any benefit, for at least two reasons: (a) he enjoys mowing the lawn, (b) he seeks to help his parents (e.g., because he likes them, because he wants to do something in return, or because he wants something from them), or both. From an interpersonal point of view, only the latter motivation—or set of motivations—is interesting. For the boy, mowing the lawn may well be one of the few ways in which he can (a) communicate love, consideration, and respect to his parents (i.e., prosocial explanation), (b) “pay back” what he has received from his parents in the past (i.e., reciprocity explanation), or (c) seek to get some different reward from his parents in the future (e.g., a permission to attend a particular party; i.e., strategy explanation). In order to pursue any of these interaction goals, the boy should not receive money in return. Moreover, when the parents start paying their son, they might be communicating “interpersonal distance,” treating their son as “anybody who could mow the lawn.” In the event that the boy mowed the lawn “for-the-parents” (prosocial explanation), then by starting to pay, the father conveys that he did not get the message that the boy wanted to convey. The son is now faced with the rules of the game as defined by the father (“whenever I do something for them, I should get paid”), and is thus no longer prepared to do any type of housework for free.

#### **Social Interaction and Relationship Features**

The general point is that the undermining effects of rewards in this and related situations can be readily explained in terms of interpersonal processes. Two explanatory concepts seem especially important. The first concept may be referred to as relationship-relevant features, such as the degree of interpersonal liking, dependence, commitment, and trust. For example, the parents have resources that the boy presumably does not really have but considers important (i.e., money), which is a source of dependence on the part of the boy and a source of power on the part of parents. Moreover, the boy and the parents have a good relationship, which is also likely to mean that they are in a trusting relationship.

The second concept may be referred to as interaction process, the sequence of behaviors that the boy and parent(s) display. Interaction process is important to understanding specific motivations (e.g., the spe-

cific motivation for wanting to help the parents) and interpersonal communication (e.g., the communication of that motivation; and the degree to which that communicated message is well understood). This type of interpretation follows from theories developed in several interaction-relevant areas of research, such as interdependence, cooperation and competition, relationships, and communication (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996).

Theoretical analyses focusing on relationship features and interaction process are also relevant to “interpersonal” situations involving many individuals, such as organizations, educational settings, or societies at large. For example, one might hypothesize that several forms of control by others are experienced as a threat not only to their competence and autonomy, but to their benevolence as well. Indeed, management and authorities often exert control (e.g., the implementation of sanctioning systems) in order to discourage noncooperative behavior (e.g., absenteeism). People may respond to such control with some strong reactance not only because they feel controlled, but also because they do not feel trusted. Just as the father and son in the scenario are communicating through behavior, so might authorities and the public by means of their mutual actions communicate trust or distrust, respect or disdain, and sympathy or apathy.

It is also appropriate to outline that in the interpersonal life “reward” frequently also entails “hidden rewards.” For example, acts of self-sacrifice are rewarding to the partner not only because of the relatively concrete outcomes they yield but also because of liking, trust, and related forms of positive intent that such acts reveal (Van Lange et al., 1997). It seems plausible that, over the long run, such positive acts yield desirable outcomes in terms of functioning and mental health. This may be true even when the psychological needs of competence and autonomy are thwarted by some acts of sacrifice (e.g., sacrificing time and energy by helping the partner to complete an ego-involving task). The reason would be that, over the long run, one important ingredient to healthy relationships (and healthy individuals) is the exchange of material and immaterial rewards, and to do so in a fairly unconditional, trusting manner.

In closing, it should be clear that these lines of reasoning are not inconsistent with SDT. At the same time, given that hypotheses derived from SDT often have been tested in interpersonal settings, and given that external regulation often entails regulation by socially relevant others, it becomes especially important to outline the importance of theoretical analyses that focus on relationship-relevant features, such as sympathy, commitment, and trust, and interaction processes through which individuals communicate sympathy, commitment, and trust.

## Notes

I thank Sander Koole for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this commentary.

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## Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory: A View From the Hierarchical Model of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

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Self-determination theory (SDT) has gone through several revisions over the years (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 1991). In the target article, Deci and Ryan present the most recent version of SDT. The authors make a number of important points and it is impossible to discuss them all here. Because there is a fairly high level of agreement between SDT and my own position presented more fully in the Hierarchical Model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Vallerand, 1997; Vallerand & Ratelle, in press), I therefore focus on certain elements of disagreement between the two perspectives or issues that deserve further treatment. Thus, I focus on four main points:

1. The importance of a hierarchical structure of motivational processes.
2. The role of psychological needs in the motivational sequence.
3. Individual differences in needs.
4. The different roles of the need for relatedness.

However, before discussing these various issues I first briefly present the Hierarchical Model of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation.

### A Quick Overview of the Hierarchical Model

The model takes into consideration the different types of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) at three levels of generality, how these various motivations are related, as well as the determinants and consequences of these motivational representations. The model appears in Figure 1.

Several elements deserve our attention. First, the model posits that we must consider motivation from a multidimensional perspective. Thus, we agree with Deci and Ryan that it is not sufficient to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in a dichotomy. Rather, we must consider these constructs on a continuum in which different types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation range from a high to a low level of self-determination. These constructs are: intrinsic motivation to know, to accomplish, and to experience stimulation (see Vallerand et al., 1992, 1993 on the three types of intrinsic motivation), integrated, identified, introjected, and external regulation, and finally amotivation (or the relative absence of motivation; see Deci & Ryan, 1985). Much research now supports the existence of such a continuum (see Vallerand, 1997 for a review).